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SERMON TITLE: "O Happy Day!"
SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:13-21, John 6:51-63
DATE: April 1, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ JOHN 6:51-63 and Luke 24

☩ is a happy day! It is Resurrection Day. Imagine it from Jesus' perspective.

He had walked into death:

- the death the Pharisees were trapped in of legalistic, exclusive religion;
- the death created by the misuse of power by the Roman government
- the abuse of the cross
- the abandonment by his closest friends
- surrounded by thieves
- humiliating ridicule
- pain of separation from God
- darkness
- despair

Jesus experienced all these elements of death because he had willingly descended to earth in the flesh.

But then, this day, some 1,988 years ago, he awoke before dawn inside a sealed tomb. How could he see? Remember, to him, the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light" (Ps 139:12). Angels were present in his awakening, opening the stone, folding his face cloth, unwinding the shroud. He ascends the stairs to the opening of the tomb and steps outside. The morning star still lingers in the sky; the planets, Mars or Saturn. How solid and good the ground felt. The triumph of the Victory ~ He was ALIVE. He had overcome death! **God's Truth Prevailed!**

"I Am the Resurrection and the Life," Jesus had said (Jn 11:25). He now experienced it fully.

Looking around at the garden, having accomplished the salvation of all the ones he loved, even the restoration of nature itself, what joy this was for Jesus. He had trusted God explicitly to the very end and was NOT left in the grave, but vindicated after death. He is so incredibly joyful.

The reward is so great, the victory so awesome, when he looks at people later, their anxieties do not even faze him. In all their struggles he urges them—and you and me—to believe. It is incredibly solid ground.

But it's still predawn. No one knows yet. They are all asleep, exhausted from the last few days. For them, there is no solid ground under their feet; nothing that feels fixed. It had all crumbled with the arrest and crucifixion. Faith has been shaken to the core. They are still mired in the death. They are huddled in fear.

We all can relate to unsettling times. Perhaps a big change like an unexpected death or a divorce, or loss of your home or job or perhaps an awaited blessing does not materialize. At those times it is hard to recognize anything else. You feel as if you are walking in death. You're on unsteady ground, like Jesus' disciples.

Yet it's quite stunning that tradition says not many weeks later, on Pentecost, the disciples wrote a creed of their beliefs.¹

How many of you know the Apostles' Creed?

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

That's where they were on this Sunday that year. He was buried. So . . . what's next?

Do we try to copy Jesus by remembering what a loving, self-sacrificing person he was? Do we once again try to live by Jewish law as defined by the Pharisees? Do we try to carry out justice; be a moral person; go to church each week?

That sounds "duty-bound" and dreary. I mean, no one else in history has ever achieved living by the law. But the world would be a better place if we all lived like Jesus, right?

Frankly, that's not the stuff of a "Happy Easter!" What are our options now?

¹ Apostles' Creed, transcribed by Donald J. Boon. See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01629a.htm>, accessed March 28, 2018.

So you have this contrast of dismal disciples and jubilant Jesus.

- ~ The disciples huddled in a room with the doors locked for fear.
- ~ Jesus, after the worst death, absolutely alive in every way!

Don't you just want to shout back in light of the history that we know, "Hey, wake up disciples! Run to the tomb! Believe it! Just grasp it! All of it is true!

But they weren't there yet. To them, he had *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.*

If that's the end of the story, then the Pharisees would be happy. They could simply carry on striving to keep the law. The politicians could keep seeking power. We could still try to command God to do what we want to happen to us each day.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

That was the extent of Jesus' followers' experience early on Easter morning. *But* something did drive them to the tomb to have a look. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, then Peter and the beloved disciple, John, went looking for Jesus.

The tomb was empty, "but they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead" (John 20:9).

But later that day, when two followers were walking down the road, Jesus discretely joined them. Notice that he just "showed up" on an obscure road where his followers were. They invited him to the house where the disciples were staying. (Jesus is absolutely sneaky in his pursuit of us!) It's dinnertime. When Jesus sat down at the table and took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, suddenly they recognized him! It's the same Jesus who literally gave his body and blood for them. HE'S ALIVE!!

That was the first Communion.

Jesus is the bread from heaven. That is what Jesus was talking about in our Scripture (John 6:51-63).

"This bread, which I [will] offer so the world may live, is my flesh. . . . Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has

eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day."
(Jn 6:53-54)

The meaning and symbolism all began to come together. **Life is in Him.** HE LIVES, even though he gave his very self to die, because the Father raised him from the dead. When we believe and "feed on him, he will live in us."

Professor Marianne Thompson puts it this way: "Jesus' flesh, both his life and death, is "true food" and his blood "true drink" in that it accomplishes the ends of food and drink: it gives life."²

Jesus said, "I AM the Bread of LIFE. I am the Resurrection and The LIFE. I am the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE." It's quite clear. But, you have to "eat of him every day." Not just once or twice a year. How would it be if you only ate food twice a year? That's absurd, of course. You would die. You must consume Jesus daily.

And no, you cannot go it alone. We must move beyond religion to imbibing Jesus daily for new life into eternity. And we do this together, as brothers and sisters from every tongue and tribe and people and nation.

When Jesus talked about eating his flesh, the disciples complained. Jesus said:

"Does this offend you? Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? **The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life**" (Jn 6:61b-63).

That's what Easter is all about.

O HAPPY DAY! Jesus is alive! God reached down and gave Him to you. Feed on Him and you will live, too. Weeks later, the disciples wrote the rest of the story:

On the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Do you believe? The invitation is extended to you.

AMEN

² Marianne Meye Thompson, *John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 155.